WATER QUALITY TEAM MEETING NOTES

March 14, 2001
National Marine Fisheries Service Offices
Portland, Oregon

Introductions and Review of the Agenda.

Mark Schneider of NMFS and Mary Lou Soscia of EPA, WQT co-chairs, welcomed everyone to the meeting, held March 14 at the National Marine Fisheries Service offices in Portland, Oregon. The meeting agenda and a list of attendees are attached as Enclosures A and B. Please note that some of the enclosures referenced in these meeting notes may be too lengthy to routinely attach to the minutes; please contact Kathy Ceballos (503/230-5420) to obtain copies.

2. Columbia/Snake Mainstem TMDL Update.

Soscia reported that work continues on the development of the Columbia/Snake River Mainstem TMDL; we had a very constructive meeting with the states and tribes in Spokane on February 21, at which we were able to reach agreement, in large part, on how to work together and move forward with TMDL development, Soscia said.

As most of you are aware, Soscia continued, the states are taking the lead on the gas portion of the TMDL, while EPA is taking the lead on the temperature portion. We are hoping to have those gas and temperature workplans available for review within the next month, said Soscia. The states, tribes and EPA plan to meet monthly over the next year or so, to get the TMDL finalized and to coordinate the TMDL process with the federal water quality planning efforts.

Soscia noted that all three TMDL participants have devoted considerable time and effort to outreach and information sharing, in an effort to keep key regional stakeholders informed about the TMDL development process. To that end, there were productive meetings with the PUDs on February 14 and March 15, Soscia said. Additional one-on-one meetings have been scheduled with the irrigated agriculture and pulp and paper industries.

In response to a request from last meeting, Soscia distributed excerpts from the Upper Grande Ronde temperature TMDL, which has recently been approved by EPA (Enclosure E).

3. Water Quality Plan Development.

Dick Cassidy of the Corps reported that, since the first of the year, the action agencies have had limited meetings to flesh out the framework of the federal Water Quality Plan included as Appendix B of the 2000 FCRPS Biological Opinion. In November, he said, we shared what might be called an "enhanced framework" with EPA; discussion have been ongoing since that time.

Only last week, said Cassidy, Corps senior management approved the use of CRFM funds as the vehicle by which the Corps will continue to develop the Water Quality Plan. Cassidy said that, next week, a letter will be sent to the Corps' Walla Walla District, which will be taking the lead on the Water Quality Plan, authorizing them to proceed with further development. Cassidy added that the expected delivery date for the plan is September 30, the end of the 2001 fiscal year.

Cassidy spent a few minutes describing the two main components of the Water Quality Plan, operational activities and planning activities. Included under the latter heading are primarily those activities listed in Tables 2B and 2C in the 2000 BiOp – future structural measures to be evaluated.

The WQT spent a few minutes discussing the connections between this effort and the one- and five-year water quality implementation plans called for in the BiOp, as well as the TMDL development process. Soscia distributed copies of a recent letter from EPA to Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee chairman Samuel Penney, articulating the water quality provisions in the 2000 FCRPS BiOp as well as the items to be included in the action agencies' Water Quality Plan and the connections between these efforts and the TMDL development process. This letter is Enclosure C; please refer to this document for further details on this topic.

The WQT also discussed data needs associated with the development of the Water Quality Plan – what data is needed to operate the projects for CWA and ESA compliance, and to meet the modeling needs associated with these efforts.

The group also discussed the "implementation" portion of the implementation planning process. In response to a question, Cassidy admitted that how and when full implementation of the water quality actions identified in the 2000 FCRPS Biological Opinion will occur is unknown at this time. While the fish actions called for in the BiOp will be funded through the CRFM program, Cassidy said, the BiOp water quality actions will have to be funded through another source. At this point, he said, the only source of funds that has been identified for BiOp water quality activities is the Corps' O&M budget. At this time, he said, the Corps' O&M budget is set for the next three years; we can vary that budget by no more than 3% per year.

It sounds, then, as though funding for the implementation of the water quality measures called for in the 2000 BiOp is going to be pretty severely limited, at least for the next three years, one participant observed. However, that shouldn't preclude us from planning for those activities, so that we can include them in future budget requests, noted another participant.

Various WQT participants expressed the view that the action agencies must do

everything they can to move forward not only on planning, but on the implementation of the water quality improvements called for in the BiOp, over the next several years. Cassidy and Joe Carroll assured the group that a variety of water quality improvement projects, including flow deflector installation at various dams, will be implemented during the next few years.

Ultimately, Soscia observed that more discussion is needed on this topic; those discussions will take place both at the next WQT meeting and at various coordination meetings throughout the region during the next month.

4. Report on the SYSTDG Modeling Workshops.

Schneider reported that the two SYSTDG model workshops took place as planned; he provided a brief description of the topics addressed at these workshops. Schneider noted that, at the completion of each workshop, the participants were provided with CD-ROM copies of the SYSTDG model, to allow them to explore it more fully and to provide any comments that will help to improve the model.

Carroll observed that the intent of the SYSTDG model is to give the action agencies and others state-of-the-art projections of how gas is created, routed and dissipated through the mainstem. He noted, however, that in his view, model does not equal knowledge.

Margaret Filardo commented that she was somewhat disappointed that the workshops did not provide a better understanding of the SYSTDG model itself; she said she would have liked more information about the model's source code. Filardo added that she was disappointed that the model appears to be static with 1996 data, and can only be used for illustrative purposes.

The group discussed various avenues for resolving these concerns; ultimately, there was general agreement that it should be possible to resolve both of the concerns raised by Filardo, but that there simply wasn't time to do so at the workshops themselves. Schneider added that written comments on both the workshops and the SYSTDG model are still being sought from interested parties.

5. Water Quality Team Guidelines – Follow-Up Discussion.

Cathy Tortorici of NMFS reminded the group that, at the last WQT meeting, Mark Schneider had presented a list of WQT-designated action items and activities identified in the 2000 FCRPS Biological Opinion. She said that, as requested at that meeting, she had attempted to revise the Water Quality Team Guidelines to reflect these new assignments and responsibilities. The result of this exercise, a new draft of the WQT Guidelines dated March 14, is available as Enclosure D.

Tortorici briefly reviewed the changes she made to the Guidelines; the group spent a few minutes discussing these changes. Ultimately, Tortorici asked the other WQT participants to read carefully through the revised WQT Guidelines, with the goal of finalizing them at the March WQT meeting. I'm not sure how much flexibility we will have to massage this new language, however, given the fact that most of it was taken directly from the BiOp, Tortorici

said.

6. Report From Idaho Modeling Workgroup.

Don Essig of Idaho DEQ reported on his agency's recent activities in the Hells Canyon reach of the Snake River. There is a now a draft subbasin assessment available for public review, Essig said; this document is available from both the IDEQ and ODEQ websites. He noted that the subbasin assessment is a prelude to the TMDL. Public comment on the subbasin assessment is due by April 13; the goal is then to develop the TMDL by mid-June. Essig added that this subbasin assessment covers the Snake River from river-mile 409, at the beginning of the Oregon-Idaho border, to river-mile 188, just above the Salmon River confluence.

With respect to the Idaho modeling workgroup, said Essig, participants include IDEQ, the Idaho Department of Water Resources, the Bureau of Reclamation, CRITFC, the Nez Perce Tribe, and Boise State University's ecohydraulics group. The group met on February 20, Essig said; we plan to meet at least once a quarter now that funding for both a modeler and a model has been made available. Essig added that the group is leaning toward the purchase of the Danish Hydraulic Institute's MIKE-11 model.

Are you looking at gas only? Tortorici asked. No, we're looking at all aspect of water quality, Essig replied – one of the unique aspects of the MIKE-11 model is that it is modular, so you can add modules for dissolved gas, sediment, dissolved oxygen and other factors.

The main problem we're facing is that we don't have a lot of our own data, Essig said; a major part of this effort will be to gather the data we need to drive whatever model is ultimately chosen. There is a great deal of data out there, he said, but as most of us know from past experience, it can be quite a chore to make it all fit together.

In response to a question from Filardo, Essig said the ultimate purpose of this effort is to inform the TMDL development and FERC relicensing processes. In response to another question, he said some of the items that came up during the most recent meeting of the Idaho temperature subgroup included how criteria will be applied, particularly in reservoirs, as well as what the compliance points will be. No consensus has yet been reached on the answers to either of these questions, said Essig. He added that there was also agreement, at the last meeting of this group, that it would be extremely useful to obtain a map of all of the locations where temperature has been monitored throughout the Snake and Lower Columbia rivers.

Soscia noted that this conversation, as well as the conversations that took place earlier in today's meeting, point out the crucial nature of coordination – there are similar discussions of data needs, monitoring and modeling ongoing all over the region, she said. Given the fact that we're talking about one system, it is really important to figure out how to connect some of these discussions; that's why I asked Don to talk to us today, Soscia said. She noted that many of these same topics will be addressed at tomorrow's EPA Pacific Northwest Regional Temperature Criteria Public Informational Exchange meeting at Portland State University (covered in Agenda Item 7).

7. Temperature Review Criteria Workshop Update.

Tortorici distributed a variety of handouts, including a draft agenda for tomorrow's EPA Pacific Northwest Regional Water Temperature Criteria Public Informational Exchange workshop (Enclosure E), copies of the keynote presentation for this meeting (Enclosure F), a presentation on the water quality temperature criteria guidance workshop's presentation on the technical workgroup's synthesis paper (Enclosure G), copies of the technical synthesis of "Scientific Issues Relating to Temperature Criteria for Salmon, Trout and Charr Native to the Pacific Northwest" (Enc. H) and a paper titled "Species and Life Stage Approach" (Enc. I).

The bottom line, with respect to all of these handouts, is that, in NMFS's 1999 Biological Opinion, which reviewed Oregon's temperature standard for rearing, concluded that that standard was not adequate to protect salmonids, Tortorici said. One of the outcomes of that consultation was the development of this regional workgroup effort to put together guidance criteria that Oregon, Washington and Idaho can use as they revise their temperature standards.

The technical workgroup is looking at all aspects of temperature with regard to native salmonids, both in the tributaries and in the mainstem, Tortorici said. That workgroup may well develop recommendations as to how existing water quality criteria for temperature should be changed, both in the tributaries and the mainstem. To cut to the chase, she said, I cannot predict whether or not this guidance criteria will recommend a change to the existing temperature criteria for the mainstem Columbia; however, it is being considered as a part of this effort, and by the end of October, we will have something on the street that the states can then build into their triennial review processes.

Tortorici invited all interested WQT participants to attend tomorrow's workshop; in the meantime, she said, Don Essig and I will continue to provide updates and keep the WQT informed about progress in this arena.

8. Formation of WQT Fixed Monitoring Station Subgroup.

Schneider said this subgroup, which was discussed at last month's WQT meeting, has now met several times, most recently last Friday morning. The purpose of this subgroup is to address the tasks laid out in the 2000 BiOp, he said, the issue is the appropriateness of the locations of the various fixed monitoring stations and the quality of the data they are producing. Schneider said the subgroup has now made some progress in laying out both the tasks it will undertake and the priority in which it will undertake them. He distributed the following list:

Fixed Monitoring Station Subgroup Objectives and Tasks.

Priority 1:

- Establish the objectives and quality assurance goals of the Fixed Monitoring Stations (FMS)

- **Systematic review and evaluation of existing forebay FMS of all mainstem FCRPS dams**

- Discuss location of Warrendale, Skamania and tailrace stations for TDA FMS

- **Recommendation of FMS modifications**

- Review FMS data for completeness, bias, precision and representativeness. Includes data error checking, correcting and recording for Chroms.

- **Redundant/backup monitoring instruments and locations**

- **Spot checking of monitoring equipment**

Priority 2:

- 2001 water temperature monitoring below Bonneville Dam, Camas/Washougal vicinity

- Summary of SYSTDG workshop comments. Points of subgroup concern – documentation of model, prioritization of model improvements, model as real-time check on monitoring system

Priority 3:

- Adequacy of the existing temperature monitoring system to detecting and tracking thermal events

- Mid-Columbia FMS review and site visit

- Subgroup reports to WQT and IT as needed.

Schneider spent a few minutes going through the above list; he explained that the bold-print items are tasks taken directly from the Biological Opinion. He said the next meeting of the fixed monitoring station subgroup is scheduled for March 22; at that point, he said, our hope is to get more deeply into the details. Schneider said he will update the WQT on the subgroup's progress as more information becomes available.

9. ***Update on 2001 Spill Season.***

Russell Harding said the Corps has requested a variance for the dissolved gas standard during the 2001 spring and summer spill season. A public hearing on this issue is scheduled for this Monday, March 19 in Portland; the Oregon DEQ Commission will also be taking up the Corps' waiver request at a special meeting on March 30.

Harding said that, as has been noted previously, that the ODEQ Commission is somewhat annoyed by the lateness of the Corps' 2001 waiver request; one of the options under consideration is to grant the waiver request only for the interim period between March 30 and the Commission's regularly-scheduled meeting on May 8. The Commission will then have an

opportunity to make their displeasure explicit to the appropriate parties within the Corps at the May 8 meeting, Harding said. Cassidy said it is the Corps' position that it is providing information to the state if they want to grant a variance; however, the Corps is not requesting a variance.

The group devoted a brief discussion to what the 2000 BiOp language actually says on this subject; there was some disagreement about the exact wording of this section. It will be interesting to see how this plays out, Soscia observed.

Soscia added that, with respect to the Idaho waiver, the State of Idaho and the Nez Perce Tribe have sent out a letter which essentially says that the same criteria for granting the waiver which were used in 2000 will also be in effect in 2001. With respect to Washington, said Soscia, they have written a TDG waiver into their standards through 2003. There are also ongoing discussions between the Corps and the states about the possibility of long-term waivers that would be a part of the implementation of the mainstem TMDL, Soscia added.

10. Next WQT Meeting Date and Agenda Items.

The next meeting of the Water Quality Team was set for Tuesday, April 3, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at NMFS' Portland offices. Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.